

TRANSMETTRE/TRANSMIT

Exhibition notes by Clare Smith

Transmettre/Transmit is appropriately sited in the Chapel of the Former College of the Jesuits in Saint Omer. Transmit as in to pass to another person; to convey something, to pass on by inheritance; how our history conditions our present: these are the shades of meaning treated in the main by this project.

Documents were once copied by hand to preserve knowledge for future generations; copies of the Bible were used as a way of spreading the gospel and its teachings. The process of copying can never be exact – each time you copy something you are in danger of making a little ‘mistake’. **Olivier Michel’s** drawings start with one original and then become copies of copies, each incorporating the ‘mistakes’ of the previous copy. Thus do stories from the past come down to us in the present.

Nigel Green’s work examines the images that inform official postcard views, transmitters of institutional cultural value. What do we choose to transmit; what images are considered ‘postcard worthy’. How do we frame our views of our towns and villages? Old postcards of Saint-Omer placed in vitrines condition our viewing of the Perspex-box framed ‘postcards’ on the wall. Some of these new ‘views of Saint-Omer’ could well be old postcards, while others acquire the gloss of the ‘sanctioned view’ through their photographic representation. What would normally be registered as eyesores take on a formal beauty – once we see a representation of our surroundings rather than their reality, we transform them in our imaginations, connect them to our learnt readings of landscape.

Look or you won’t see is also a message operating in some of the other work in the Chapel. While **Nigel Green’s** work encourages us to look again at our everyday surroundings, **Sylvain Lainé** also playfully invites us to look at small, everyday occurrences, in which scrunched up, discarded sweet wrappers morph into insect-like creatures, taking on a life of their own. Look up to see **Joanna Jones’** painting placed above the line of sight and you will take in the high windows and the vaulted ceiling – the vaults themselves constructed in such a way as to ensure that sound travelled all the way through and lectures could be heard; thus **Paul Cheneour’s** sound piece, created specifically in response to this vaulting, is entirely fitting.

Unseen to many of us is the continuing sectarianism played out in communities in Glasgow, Manchester, Liverpool ... **Roy Smith’s** Super-8 films of the Orange Marches in Liverpool are projected onto the statue at the entrance of the chapel. How does the notion of faith operate today? Do we follow our political leaders based on anything other than faith? Has the power of belief really crumbled away as the vestiges of religious buildings might suggest? Or are the politics of ideology as strong as ever? How does the religious and secular power operate in the politics of today? There is a real physicality to this work which reflects its subject matter: a kind of in-your-faceness; this statue, this sculpture, what is embodied will not just go away. As well as references to traditional means of animating sculpture and emphasising its form and surface through colour and light, there is a clear tying in of the practice of film as an exploration of light and space to the practice of sculpture, but there is almost a refusal to move away from the object into film, a real assertion of the awkwardness of sculpture.

Closely related to the theme of transmission is that of loss; so we see in some of the works an act of re-placing: **Paul Cheneour's** installation in which music intermittently fills a space now usually devoid of music; where there might have been stained glass windows, now there are **Johanne Huysman's** large format digital images of sirens: feminine wiles as both warning and promise. A celebration rather than denigration, in this Christian place of learning, of the role of the temptress.

Women in charge of their own roles and their own bodies as performative and active: in **Isabelle Froment's** video piece, rather than a life-class student being exhorted to imagine the act of caressing the body with the pencil, the model caresses her own body as she writes messages on her own stomach for the viewer to read: an act of almost ordinary intimacy, yet conveying a sensuous awareness of the power of the female body as the carrier of future generations and the messiness of birth which is denied by the notion of the purity of the Virgin birth. This messiness is what viewers find difficult when learning that **Joanna Jones'** work is created by using her own body, this is the body in the painting, the canvas is the female body, the artist's own. Even if we do not see the body in action, it is important to the artist that we know this work arises out of performance and as such Joanna Jones' work brings to mind the work of artists such as Carole Schneemann by making overt the corporeal nature of the making of art.

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The Chapel of the Former College of the Jesuits, St Omer

15 September - 10 November 2007

Wednesday – Sunday 13.00-17.00

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